



Connecting
Couples

Donna Reeves Bowman, LCSW-C & David L. Bowman, MDiv

Thought of the Month News and Notes

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Issue: #81
January 2016

Dear Friends,

Fresh snow, at least at the Bowman compound! What a delight....to have a snowblower. We are blessed to be warm and have those we love close by. We hope you too, are safe and warm and ready to explore the new year, new experiences, new friends, new challenges and renewed hopes and energy.

This Thought explores the reasons why attending a workshop can be a renewal opportunity for you and your partner as well as for your relationship.

As always, if you need us, just call.

Donna and David

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JANUARY 2016: Taking The Next Step

**Taking The Next Step,
Ten Reasons to Attend Our Second Level
Workshop:
"Overcoming Reactivity"**

April 23 - 24 or September 24 - 25, 2016

1. The first workshop is a lot to take in. Our brief review will be familiar music to your ears. And, hearing it the second time, you might understand something in a new and helpful way.

2. You will be with other couples who have the same experience in Imago concepts. Everyone is already "a Believer" and relaxed...ready for more. There is a built in feeling of comradeship.

3. You will be challenged to move to new levels of providing safety and intimacy with each other.

4. You will learn how to begin any dialogue in a safe way rather than a way that feels threatening to your partner. This, alone, is worth doing the weekend.

5. You will learn a new tool for sharing your "most difficult neighborhood".

6. You will gain new insight on why your partner's brain reacts in your relationship in a very different way than your brain does.

7. You will come away with renewed hope and greater sense of empowerment for creating a relationship of depth and passion.

8. You will be inspired to see David and Donna work through a real life frustration with each other and come out of it with new growth and healing. (David shares a frustration and Donna has no idea what it will be.)

9. The whole realm of Imago insights will come together in a new way and make sense.

10. You will once again enjoy the snacks that Donna is famous for, including Costco's Chocolate Cake this time. (It's to die for!)

Now I want you to know almost every word of the "ten reasons" was taken from the feedback of actual participants who have been to one of the "Second Level" weekends. It is truly a more relaxed and enjoyable workshop for most. And it really is a powerful follow up for getting "across the

hump" in experiencing a conscious and joyful relationship.

We go from 9-6 on Saturday and 9-5 on Sunday. While we are half full already for April 23 - 24, we will still welcome 5 or 6 more couples. Or you can choose the September 24 - 25 weekend.

Research has shown that most couples backslide after the first workshop. This is true of any workshop of a personal growth nature. We have designed this two day weekend as a hedge against falling back. And it works!

**You can go on the website:
[Connecting Couples Workshops](#)
or you can email
info@ConnectingCouples.net
or call 301-404-7711 to get registered.**

And let us know of any other ways we can help you on your journey.

David (and Donna)

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS...LOTS OF OPPORTUNITIES
COMING UP!**

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Getting the Love You Want Workshops

February 26-28, 2016, Frederick, MD

April 1-3, 2016, Frederick, MD

Next Step Workshops

April 23-24, 2016

September 24-25, 2016

QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"Winter is the time for comfort, for good food and warmth, for the touch of a friendly hand

and for a talk beside the fire: it is the time for home." Edith Sitwell

"My old grandmother always used to say, Summer friends will melt away like summer snows, but winter friends are friends forever." George R.R. Martin, A Feast for Crows

"What good is the warmth of summer, without the cold of winter to give it sweetness." John Steinbeck, Travels with Charley: In Search of America

"Winter is nature's way of saying, "Up yours." Robert Byrne

"A lot of people like snow. I find it to be an unnecessary freezing of water." Carl Reiner

"Snow flurries began to fall and they swirled around people's legs like house cats. It was magical, this snow globe world." Kenneth Grahame, The Wind in the Willows

No animal, according to the rules of animal-etiquette, is ever expected to do anything strenuous, or heroic, or even moderately active during the off-season of winter." Sarah Addison Allen, The Sugar Queen

We are on this journey with you. Keep in touch!

Sincerely,

**David and Donna Bowman
Bowman & Associates, PA**

Bowman & Associates, PA, 7823 Chestnut Grove Road, Frederick, MD 21701

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Issue: #82
February 2016

Dear Friends,

It's Leap Year! What a fun concept to celebrate a once-every-four-year-spectacular. Well maybe not spectacular since we are really shy a few days this month and most of us feel that there are not enough hours in the day, days in the week, weeks...well you get the picture.

Personally, we are taking a one day holiday on February 29. Why not make your own holiday? Your own special event? We plan to sleep late, eat a bit too much and relax just enough to qualify as a holiday! Let us know if you took advantage of the 1st Annual Connecting Couples' Leap Year Frivolities.

This Thought explores the reasons that "For Better or For Worse" is not the salvo we thought it is...Let us know what you think!

As always, if you need us, just call.

Donna and David

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FEBRUARY 2016:"For Better or For Worse"

We all know this phrase. It has been a part of traditional wedding vows for as long as I can remember. We all enjoy the "better"....the good times, the romance, the kids, the family trips. What about the "worse?" Funny how we never spell out the "worse" part, or make plans as to how to

navigate the "worse" within the vows and the covenant we are making.

After all, it is a wedding; that social phenomenon where we spend huge amounts of money and ask people to travel great distances to wear their finest clothes to celebrate with us the fantasy that we will be forever happy together. We all tend to buy into the notion that the relationship will always be as exciting and joyous as the wedding day. Maybe that is why couples don't really use "for better or for worse" much anymore. Maybe this is why people drink a lot at weddings. Perhaps we are anesthetizing ourselves from the fact that this marriage has a 50% chance of ending in bitterness and devastation to all involved.

But a marriage is different than a wedding. There is no "worse" in a wedding. Even the food is sumptuous and the booze is high quality. There is lots of "worse" in a marriage (or committed relationship.) Even the best relationships have their "worse" moments.

"He turns out to be somewhat of a slob. How could I have missed that?"

"When did she become so critical? I can never do anything right anymore."

"I had no idea his career would take so much of his time or energy."

"What happened to spontaneous sex?"

"What happened to sex, period?"

"All we have time for is the kids."

"He never follows through on anything. I can't count on him."

Maybe the "worse" is even "worse"

"She is drinking a lot more than seems normal."

"I think he may be having an affair."

"I feel bad but I'm not that attracted to her anymore. All that weight she put on!"

"We can't communicate anymore. All we do is fight."

Or maybe it's "worse" than "worse"

"If he doesn't get help, I'm out of here."

"I don't want to do this anymore!"

"We need to separate for a while."

"She has a mental disorder. Our marriage is over."

**OK. The most radical idea in Imagoland is the one I like the best. It is summed up nicely in the title of one of the chapters in *Making Marriage Simple*, the newest book by Harville and Helen. It goes like this:
"Incompatibility is Grounds for Marriage".**

Yes, it is truly a radical idea: that the "worse" that is referred to in the traditional vow is actually proof that not only are we in the right relationship if we have conflict, but that the "worse" gives us a chance to rise to a new level of being.

To experience love without conditions or expectations.

To experience life where we are responsible for our own actions and results and not someone else.

To learn compassion for someone who has shortcomings.

To live without being a victim.

To learn that we don't have to change another to be deeply connected to them.

To learn kindness and humility.

To practice patience and to experience the freedom of not insisting on our own way.

To have the joy of extending ourselves for the sake of another.

To have the ultimate satisfaction of living in vintage love where we will grow old with

**our very flawed and exasperating partner,
who is learning to grow old with us.**

**"For better or for worse" The "better" is a
bonus. But the "worse" is also a gift!**

David (and Donna)

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QUOTES OF THE MONTH

**"Where there is love there is life." Mahatma
Gandhi**

**"To be fully seen by somebody, then, and be
loved anyhow-this is a human offering that
can border on miraculous." Elizabeth Gilbert,
Committed: A Skeptic Makes Peace with
Marriage**

**"If I get married, I want to be very married."
Audrey Hepburn**

**"I love you without knowing how, or when, or
from where. I love you simply, without
problems or pride: I love you in this way
because I do not know any other way of
loving but this, in which there is no I or you,
so intimate that your hand upon my chest is
my hand, so intimate then when I fall asleep**

your eyes close." Pablo Neruda

"You know you're in love when you can't fall asleep because reality is finally better than your dreams." Dr. Seuss

"Love recognizes no barriers. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination full of hope." Maya Angelou

"A successful marriage requires falling in love many times, always with the same person." Mignon McLaughlin

"I am nothing special, of this I am sure. I am a common man with common thoughts and I've led a common life. There are no monuments dedicated to me and my name will soon be forgotten, but I've loved another with all my heart and soul, and to me, this has always been enough." Nicholas Sparks,

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Issue: #83
March 2016

Dear Friends,

Anger. It's in the news, in politics, in the workplace, in families. If you coast along, with a few ups and downs and maybe with only a blip or two, anger may not register much with you. However, if you or a loved one seems to be subject to anger a lot or even more than usual, then this Thought is for you! Admit it, we all have urges to just lash out when we have just the "right" stimulus, since it is not our "fault" but (insert reason here) fault!

Learn more about "damage control" in this Thought! I am interested in your feedback!

As always, if you need us, just call.

Donna and David

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MARCH 2016: "The Anatomy of Anger"

It's time to understand exactly what is going on when there is a lot of anger surfacing in your relationship. Anger can be a devastating rupture to the joyful connection that we want in our intimate relationship.

I tell men that their anger is a major turn off for their partner. It is a good strategy to

learn to express our anger in ways that are connecting and even comforting, rather than the usual reactive blast that is scary. Yes, you heard me. I submit that for a man to express his negative feelings in a conscious way can actually feel like a gift to his partner who has been longing to know "what's wrong".

I tell women that their anger is most likely going to be heard as criticism and is going to send their partners into the disconnected land of shame. Sorry. That's just the way it is! Again, negative feelings carefully expressed with ownership can be a path to greater empathy.

But why is anger so triggering?

Many of us grew up in an environment where anger was scary and devastating to relationships. If the parents were angry with each other it spelled anxiety for the little ones. If the parent(s) were angry with us then it meant we were bad and possibly helpless to defend ourselves. Even in my non-emotional home, when my parents did get angry it felt like the end of the world to us children.

What is anger all about?

I think of anger as protest. When a child has a temper tantrum, it is most likely because they are being prevented from doing or having something they want. So they are protesting this situation, as silly or as useless as this might be. It's the same with adults. When we get angry at our partner we are really protesting against something they are doing or not doing that has a deleterious effect on us. It is simply that we don't like what's happening. An important note is that the anger is not really "caused" by our partner. It is our own creation to protect ourselves. When I can't get the lawn mower started and I wind up kicking it and cursing it, no reasonable person would say that the lawn mower did anything to me. It

failed to start for very explainable and emotionally neutral reasons. (Probably it's that I didn't clean the air filter.)

When Tom Hanks' character kicks Wilson out of the cave in a fit of rage, it is because of his dilemma and not due to anything Wilson did. He is protesting his situation and the resulting fears he is dealing with.

Which brings us to the last point about anger. Beneath all anger, I believe, is some lurking fear. Our kid runs into the street and we get angry at them. Are we really just angry or does fear lie at the root of our response?

The same is true with our partner. I see anger as a protest or a hedge against the possibility that our partner does not fully see our point of view. Or that they may hurt us somehow. Or that they may not even love us or care.

And, of course, beneath all this is a childhood hurt or fear that still lives in us. When we had car trouble and Donna innocently asked "Did you change the oil like it says?" I flew into a holy rage. Does she see me as totally incompetent? Why is she criticizing me? And, Oh yes, my father had a way of pointing out all the things I didn't do right. I developed a permanent sunburn around such criticism, and it felt like Donna was slapping my sunburn all over again.

So the next time anger rears up in your relationship, take a few moments to consider these thoughts. It may help in damage control.

As always, we welcome your feedback and responses.

We still have several spots left for our unique second level workshop on April 23-24.

David (and Donna)

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Call today!)**

September 24-25, 2016

QUOTES OF THE MONTH

**People ask me what I do in winter when
there's no baseball. I'll tell you what I do. I
stare out the window and wait for spring.
Rogers Hornsby**

**Behold, my friends, the spring is come; the
earth has gladly received the embraces of the
sun, and we shall soon see the results of their
love! Sitting Bull**

**In the Spring, I have counted 136 different
kinds of weather inside of 24 hours. Mark
Twain**

**"I love being married. It's so great to find one
special person you want to annoy for the rest
of your life." Rita Rudner**

**Italy, and the spring and first love all together
should suffice to make the gloomiest person
happy. Bertrand Russell**

**Spring being a tough act to follow, God
created June. Al Bernstein**

**"If you text 'I love you' to a person and the
person writes back an emoji - no matter what
that emoji is, they don't love you back."
Chelsea Peretti**

**"A little Madness in the Spring Is wholesome
even for the King." Emily Dickinson**

**"Despite the forecast, live like it's Spring."
Lilly Pulitzer**

**"Love is telling someone their hair extensions
are showing." Natasha Leggero**

**"In the spring, at the end of the day, you
should smell like dirt." Margaret Atwood**

**"Spring is nature's way of saying, Let's
party!" Robin Williams**

**We are on this journey with you. Keep in
touch!**

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Issue: #84
April 2016

Dear Friends,

We have a challenge for you this month. Shortly, we will ask you to do the opposite of what we usually expect: instead of "keep reading" we will challenge you to "stop reading" and unburden yourselves. Are you curious? We hope so! EnJoy our Thought this month!

As always, if you need us, just call.

Donna and David

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APRIL 2016: "Release Your Joy"

One of the Principles of a Fully Alive Relationship is to "Release Your Joy Every Chance You Get." What do we mean when we offer that as a Principle? We mean making a conscious decision to do something that will celebrate your Togetherness... your Couple-Hood! Recognizing Joy in the fact that you are Alive...Joy in the fact that you are (and have the chance to figure out how to be) Together...Joy in having family and friend Relationships...Joy in having food to eat...Joy in being able to walk...able to see...able to hear.

It is SOOOO easy to get caught up in "life" (or the "brutal facts" as our mentor, Hedy

Schleifer, calls them.) And, soon, life begins to feel like a burden. We go through the motions with ourselves, our Partners, and our Family....all the people in our life who REALLY matter to us. And, then it is so easy to become so burdened and stressed by life that all our relationships suffer.

Remember your Romantic Days? Nobody had to remind you to release your Joy with each other. You became energized over a sunny day. You were ecstatic when you saw a butterfly together. You were enjoying deep intimacy while sharing an Outback Special. NOTHING could stop your Joy!!!

NOW...QUIT READING, go find your Partner and make plans to find and release your Joy together in some intentional way (whether they "want" to or not!)

EnJoy!

David (and Donna)

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QUOTES OF THE MONTH

The bond that links your true family is not one of blood, but of respect and joy in each other's life. Richard Bach

Find a place inside where there's joy, and the joy will burn out the pain. Joseph Campbell

Happiness lies in the joy of achievement and the thrill of creative effort. Franklin D. Roosevelt

We are shaped by our thoughts; we become what we think. When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves. Buddha

There is no glory in star or blossom till looked upon by a loving eye; There is no fragrance in April breezes till breathed with joy as they wander by. William C. Bryant

We could never learn to be brave and patient, if there were only joy in the world. Helen Keller

Joy is prayer; joy is strength: joy is love; joy is a net of love by which you can catch souls. Mother Teresa

The walls we build around us to keep sadness out also keeps out the joy. Jim Rohn

A thing of beauty is a joy forever: its loveliness increases; it will never pass into nothingness. John Keats

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Issue: #85
May 2016

Dear Friends,

They say Memorial Day is the official beginning of summer. It doesn't feel like it weather-wise to us but admittedly, we are seeing flip flops lined up by the door, dusting off the beach cooler and once again, ignoring the "get in shape for summer" articles! Now THIS article, this Thought, is much easier to digest and to take action upon. We hope you agree. Let us know what you think!

As always, if you need us, just call.

Donna and David

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MAY 2016: "Your Relationship Bank Account"

How would you like to be in possession of a bank account where you could make a deposit anytime you wanted using an unlimited supply of resources that you alone possess? Pretty neat, huh?

We all have exactly that kind of bank account. It is called a relationship. We can improve, no, create the kind of relationship we want by making deposits regularly into the relationship bank account. We each have that much power. We are all 100 % responsible 100% of the time for our

part in the relationship.

But what if my partner is acting like a #&%+ and does not seem interested in improving things? No matter. The bank account can be replenished by either partner, but if your partner is low on resources it is still to your strategic advantage to add positive deposits rather than to withhold them or to make withdrawals. (I know this is not our natural instinct. But intimate relationships are hard to achieve, and sometimes we need supernatural or counter- instinctive measures to make it work. It may call for generosity and even sacrifice. So what? We sacrifice to get a degree, or to lose weight. Whoever told you that terms like "going the second mile" and "sacrifice" and "stretching" should not be required to acquire something so precious as a successful loving relationship?)

I want to offer three simple ways you can make the space between you move to a more positive level.

1. Express appreciations to your partner. You can single-handedly improve things in any relationship by actively expressing 3-5 appreciations for your partner each day. (I know, you are not feeling appreciative because of the way your partner is treating you. What if you stayed home from work anytime you didn't feel like going? What if you didn't pay your taxes because you didn't feel like it?) Pick some aspect of your life that you can honestly appreciate and see what happens.

2. Practice courtesy. Nothing special; just the same kind of courtesy that you would offer your colleagues or a stranger for that matter. I like to tell people to treat their partner at least as well as you treat your dog.

3. Learn to cherish your partner. Make a

search-and-discover mission to get really clear about how your partner might feel cherished. Many women feel cherished when their partner "really" listens to them or does some act of service like cleaning up in the kitchen or cooking a meal. Many men feel cherished when their partner shows them affection or expresses some word of respect or affirmation. For help with this, see "The Five Love languages" by Gary Chapman. It was Gandhi who said "You must be the change you want to see". Start making new positive deposits in your relationship space and watch what happens.

As always I welcome any feedback.

David (and Donna)

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QUOTES OF THE MONTH

We've got this gift of love, but love is like a precious plant. You can't just accept it and leave it in the cupboard or just think it's going to get on by itself. You've got to keep watering it. You've got to really look after it and nurture it. John Lennon

"If one synchronized swimmer drowns, do all the rest have to drown too? Steven Wright

**Care is a state in which something does matter; it is the source of human tenderness.
Rollo May**

"That awkward moment when you write a super long, heartfelt note in someone's yearbook and they write 'Have a Great Summer!!'"

"Summer is the season when a man thinks he can cook better on an outdoor grill than his wife can on an indoor stove"

But let there be spaces in your togetherness and let the winds of the heavens dance between you. Love one another but make not a bond of love: let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls. Khalil Gibran

"A lot of parents pack up their troubles and send them off to summer camp." Raymond Duncan

Truth is everybody is going to hurt you: you just gotta find the ones worth suffering for. Bob Marley

Never above you. Never below you. Always beside you. Walter Winchell

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Issue: #86
June 2016

Dear Friends,

Summer is upon us! We look forward to workshops, phone calls and conversations with you, sprinkled among some lazy, hazy days of relaxing with family and friends. This thought is a reflection on the dialogue process you learned in the workshops. It's a little refresher that I hope will give you some new insight: let me know what you think!

As always, if you need us, just call.

Donna and David

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JUNE 2016: "Dialogue Is the Therapy"

What is it that helps a relationship get better? What moves a relationship from a passive co-existence, or worse, a realm of negative feelings and constant defenses, to a relationship of relaxed and joyful connection?

What would help your relationship become one where you both are delighted to be in each other's company and where you look to your partner to truly have your back in any and all situations, even when you are not at your best?

Well I know that my wife, Donna and I experience this positive connection when we are attending to each other, or "showing up" as we like to say. Beyond showing up we need to feel that each of us is "gotten" to use another of our terms. And "gotten" is regardless of whether we agree or not. Then the icing on the cake of connection is for us to feel that we get what each other is feeling around any given situation.

Now this sounds great and we approximate this connection "some" of the time. The rest of the time we try to keep negativity out of it. Any negative comment or action is a no-no and requires a "do-over." I can tell you that each time we connect in this positive way it helps each of us feel a bit better: physically, mentally, and spiritually. Guess what! We actually have a tool for doing this connecting. It is called dialogue. Intentional Dialogue to be exact. Do we always sit across from each other and mirror perfectly and validate and empathize in the structure that we teach in the workshop? No, I can tell you that we get closer to the actual structure when the subject gets dicey or feelings seem vulnerable.

But I am talking more in this piece about the "spirit" of the dialogue. The commitment to withhold anything negatively presented and to be willing to cross the bridge and mirror (or actively listen without defense or response.) The commitment to validate (or let our partner know that we really "get" them.) The commitment to empathize (or to show our compassion and a bit of willingness to open our heart to what our partner might be feeling.)

I know this is simply review for all who read this. But my point is that "dialogue," in my mind is more of an attitude than it is a perfect completion of a precise communication exercise.

When I served as campus minister at a small

mid-western college, the music teacher was a fanatic for Bach, and Bach done perfectly, if you know what I mean. "There is no interpretation while playing Bach," she would say. The students were bored and lifeless. I yearned for them to learn Tchaikovsky with his freer form and wonderfully passionate melodies.

There is a case for both. The dialogue cannot be sloppy. But it also cannot be without spirit and passion for loving the otherness of the other. At any rate, being in a "dialogical" place with another is always therapeutic.

As always, I love your feedback or questions.

David (and Donna)

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QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"The only reason why we ask other people how their weekend was is so we can tell them about our own weekend." Chuck Palahniuk, *Invisible Monsters*

A sudden silence in the middle of a conversation suddenly brings us back to

essentials: it reveals how dearly we must pay for the invention of speech. E. M. Cioran

"Sometimes when it looks like I'm deep in thought I'm just trying not to have a conversation with people." Pete Wentz

"Good Morning!" said Bilbo, and he meant it. The sun was shining, and the grass was very green. But Gandalf looked at him from under long bushy eyebrows that stuck out further than the brim of his shady hat. "What do you mean?" he said. "Do you wish me a good morning, or mean that it is a good morning whether I want it or not; or that you feel good this morning; or that it is a morning to be good on?" "All of them at once," said Bilbo. "And a very fine morning for a pipe of tobacco out of doors, into the bargain." J.R.R. Tolkien, The Hobbit

"Can we talk?" Joan Rivers

A good conversationalist is not one who remembers what was said, but says what someone wants to remember. John Mason Brown

Conversation is an exercise of the mind; gossip is merely an exercise of the tongue. Anonymous

"Conversation, like certain portions of the anatomy, always runs more smoothly when lubricated." Marquis de Sade

If other people are going to talk, conversation becomes impossible. James Mcneill Whistler

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Sincerely,

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Issue: #87
July 2016

Dear Friends,

Words, words words! Everything seems to be about words these days. We are inundated with social media, texts, phone calls and politics. But what about the words we use daily with our loved ones? Even the words bouncing around in our private thoughts? I would like to get you thinking about the narrative with which we delight and burden ourselves. I hope this Thought is helpful!

As always, if you need us, just call.

Donna and David

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JULY: "What Narrative Are You Carrying?"

This article is designed to encourage all of us to examine the narrative we create and carry about our Partner. If your narrative about him/her is that they are the sweetest, kindest, and safest person you can imagine, then you can quit reading. (You can even withdraw from receiving these Thoughts of the Month.)

But if your narrative is that she is always critical or that he doesn't listen...or that she spends too much money or that he is only interested in sex...or any of a thousand different negative narratives that we create

and maintain about our Partner...then we need to talk!

It is so easy and natural for us to develop a negative narrative. Our reptilian brain (affectionately known as our lizard) has the task of reminding us that this hurtful thing happened once so we better be on guard as it will happen again and again. And so we look for the hurtful behavior in everything our Partner does. In other words, we assign a role to our Partner that says they are always this way or that way.

I went through some years of truly believing that Donna had a daily mission of finding every wrong thing that I did and criticizing me for it. I was on the way to making myself miserable and feeling trapped. She, in turn, was developing a counter narrative that said I was touchy and would not allow her to voice any opinion, idea, or frustration. Once we were able to drop our narrative of each other (through countless dialogues and repeated telling of our Stories) we both began to connect more freely and joyfully with each other.

Here are a few of the reasons to drop your negative narrative:

1. Your Partner will hate being "pigeon holed" by you. It will pollute your Space in powerful and painful ways.

2. You may be wrong. Narratives often represent a subjective and flawed view of his/her intentions.

3. Your narrative is mostly projection. Remember that 90% of your feelings are about you and your story.

4. Focusing on negativity is unhealthy for you, your Partner, and your Relationship. ("Energy follows attention.")

So I invite you to do two things:

1. Put an end to the expectation you carry of your Partner's bad behavior and approach every interaction as if it is new.

2. Visualize your Partner as a child telling their Story in order to stay safe and survive. This will develop your compassion rather than your reactivity.

We welcome comments and ideas about this and any other issues.

David (and Donna)

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QUOTES OF THE MONTH

Good, better, best. Never let it rest. 'Til your good is better and your better is best. St. Jerome

One advantage of talking to yourself is that you know at least somebody's listening. Franklin P. Jones

Our greatest weakness lies in giving up. The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time. Thomas A. Edison

Get your facts first, then you can distort them

as you please. Mark Twain

I believe that if life gives you lemons, you should make lemonade... And try to find somebody whose life has given them vodka, and have a party. Ron White

You can't cross the sea merely by standing and staring at the water. Rabindranath Tagore

If you can dream it, you can do it. Walt Disney

We are on this journey with you. Keep in touch!

Sincerely,

**David and Donna Bowman
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Issue: #88
August 2016

Dear Friends,

As summer draws to a close and we anticipate cooler temperatures and a "hot" election cycle, we either are eager or wishing it was all over so we can move on!

I encourage you to sit on the porch or a bench in the park, absorb the feeling of the changing season and breathe! My next request is that you read this Thought, which I believe is a bit challenging, and is likely even hard work. I know you are up to the challenge! It will really make you stop and think about whether or not you truly "get" your partner and what "getting" really means. I look forward to hearing what you think.

Questions? Just call me!

Donna and David

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AUGUST: "Validation: The Power Tool of Intimacy"

Most of you have heard Donna and me say that Intimacy is "Into me see." What this means is...the willingness for another to truly see me...to know me...to be allowed into my vulnerable places...and the willingness to go there for the Other also. This is intimacy. It is more than sex (although the Hebrew concept for having sex is translated as "knowing.")

Take a moment now and asses your own sense of intimacy with your Partner. Are you willing to be seen deeply and fully? And to see deeply and fully?

My thought this month is that you have the power to increase the intimacy level of your relationship. Yes, you can do this on your own. The key is in growing your capacity to validate. Big word-"validate." I think it means to truly "get" another person. Bruce Willis's character in "The Story of Us" says "In the beginning it felt like Katie really "got" me. And believe me, there's no better feeling than being gotten."

Of the various counselors I have had through the years, the one or two who really were helpful and empowered transformation were the ones who "got" me. Being "gotten" is not hearing advice. It's not being yelled at. It's not having to deal with another's interpretation. It is being unconditionally and generously understood from another whose total agenda is about what is going on with me.

Let me quickly say that I fail miserably at this many times. The other day Donna was reporting about her day and I thought I was listening. But she pointed out that I made a few understanding comments and then began talking about the election. Trust me: we are often not as good at communication as we would like to think we are.

The world we live in does not support the concept of validation. The world we live in increasingly looks for one who is wrong and one who is right. The football player sits for the National Anthem and everyone weighs in with their own opinion and with what they would do. Indeed, it is hard....no, actually, it is an art to fully enter the world of the other in a way that conveys "you make sense" or "I get you."

Even when our intentions are noble we have a hard time fully validating someone with a different experience. A woman reveals that she had a miscarriage and you'll hear well-meaning people say "It's probably for the best" or "Be thankful you can always have another child" or "God needed your baby more than you did." I have heard these very statements and worse.

When someone is saying, doing, or feeling things that don't make sense to us and that we cannot validate, we simply need more information. As Donna says so often, "With enough information, everyone makes sense."

Often people are concerned about validating something that is not acceptable or something that isn't the truth. Validation is NOT acceptance or agreement as to the truth of something. (That is what courtrooms are for.) Validation is about connection and understanding. Out of connection and understanding comes safety. And out of safety comes transformation.

So when our Partner does or says something really jerky or something that really hurts us, it is very difficult to even think of validation...much less offer it. It is especially challenging for those people who were severely deprived of being "gotten" when they were growing up.

Like our friend, Yumi Schleifer taught us, validation is like a stool with three legs.

The first leg is to validate the actual situation being described. "Donna, it makes sense that you said the cabinets are a mess because some items are indeed out of place."

The second leg is for me to take some ownership. "I see how I contributed because I put some of the things in the wrong place."

The third leg is to move into compassion for the linkage to the childhood story. "Donna, I can see how this may trigger some feelings because as a child you had to be the one to straighten out messes in your home while others seemed oblivious."

So, for practice, take a happening from somewhere in your life that you are not happy with. Now do some inner work on how you might go about validating the person involved. I do believe as you increase your capacity to really "get your partner" (without blame and shame) you will be rewarded over time with a kinder and more connected relationship.

Let me know how it goes!

David (and Donna)

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QUOTES OF THE MONTH

"Just like children, emotions heal when they are heard and validated." Jill Bolte Taylor

**By all these lovely tokens September days are here,
With summer's best of weather And autumn's best of cheer.
Helen Hunt Jackson**

**The spring, summer, is quite a hectic time for people in their lives,
but then it comes to autumn, and to winter, and you can't but help think back to the year that was,
and then hopefully looking forward to the year that is approaching.
Enya**

**"A lion of truth never assumes anything without validity. Assumptions are quick exits for lazy minds that like to graze out in the fields without bother."
Suzy Kassem**

**"Fall is my favorite season in Los Angeles, watching the birds change color and fall from the trees."
David Letterman**

**There is a time in the last few days of summer when the ripeness of autumn fills the air.
Rudolfo Anaya**

**"The one person you'll be spending the rest of your life with is you. Treat yourself with love and respect."
Elle Sommer**

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Sincerely,

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Issue: #89
September 2016

Dear Friends,

Fall is upon us! What a lovely season to anticipate cooler weather, back to school events, and sports. Who can deny the allure of a little football? Even if you aren't a fan, you can get some alone-time when your partner is glued to a big screen by taking a walk, getting that pumpkin spiced latte or raking leaves. Whatever your call, take a few moments to enjoy this Thought. It might even leave you speechless (for a bit!)

Questions? Just call me!

Donna and David

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SEPTEMBER: "The Art of Keeping Your Mouth Shut"

Mark Twain once said "Better to keep your mouth shut and appear stupid, than to open it and remove all doubt." I truly believe that much of the conflict in an intimate relationship could be eliminated by practicing the art of keeping one's mouth shut. Or more accurately, learning when to talk and how to say things.

Here's how it works to our detriment. Something happens (or somebody says something) that threatens us....threatens our self-image...our sense of worth....our sense of well-being. Our lower brain, both the reptilian part which serves our survival and the mammalian part which reacts to feeling hurt, kicks into action. The general message is "Do something, dummy!"

The message travels up to the neo-cortex which translates a primitive message of "Defend yourself; kill the son of a...." to "Say something in retaliation; get them back." After all the neo-cortex is just smart enough to know that killing someone lands you in prison, while words are protected under "free speech." Unfortunately, the most wonderful part of our brain, the frontal lobe, does not get utilized because by now we are mired down in defending ourselves and planning our next assault in the proliferation of the conflict.

(Disclaimer: I'm not sure I have all the brain stuff exactly right, but I am damned sure I have the basic progression right.)

Think back. How many of your conflicts could have been lessened or avoided altogether by someone just keeping their mouth shut? Or to put it another way, how many of your conflicts are resolved or diminished by using a lot of words? Words are way overrated in relationships. A hug or a tender touch says thousands of words. An act of service tops all the words that make up a promise. A smile speaks volumes to the recipient.

I am most successful with couples when they are practicing a stewardship of words. Abundant words, carefully chosen, and spoken only in the structure of dialogue. All else is neutral at best and destructive at worst. Silent connecting is a pure thing of joy. Try it!

Sadly, the world advises us to "speak up and defend ourselves" but to what end? The debate is judged on who can get in the most clever "word" damage. No wonder we are feeling disappointed and sort of empty. Where are the real leaders of human relations when we need them? We can name the Prophets of nonviolence in word and deed...Jesus, Mohammed, Gandhi and Martin Luther King.

(I just had a weird thought. What if, in the next debate, the candidates are instructed to hug each other and use the first 4

minutes each appreciating things about the other. Can you imagine the resulting commentary? It could be transforming.)

Okay, I've not lost my mind, but you could try this with your partner for real. At the very least, try practicing the art of keeping your mouth shut and see how much positive energy you produce in yourself and in those around you.

As always, we welcome your thoughts. And please register for the parenting workshop December 3-4.

David (and Donna)

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QUOTES OF THE MONTH

A single conversation across the table with a wise man is better than ten years mere study of books. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Silence is one of the great arts of conversation. Marcus Tullius Cicero

Forget all the bars and schmoozing and everybody checking out everybody else. My ideal date would be to park in a dark place, check out the stars, and have a great conversation. When all else fails, you can just make out. Brooke Burke

The most influential of all educational factors is the conversation in a child's home. William Temple

She had lost the art of conversation but not, unfortunately, the power of speech. George Bernard Shaw

To have God speak to the heart is a majestic experience, an experience that people may miss if they monopolize the conversation and never pause to hear God's responses. Charles Stanley

A happy marriage is a long conversation which always seems too short. Andre Maurois

It was impossible to get a conversation going, everybody was talking too much. Yogi Berra

We are on this journey with you. Keep in touch!

Sincerely,

**David and Donna Bowman
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Issue: #90
October 2016

Dear Friends,

Is it an understatement to say this is a Spooky Month leading into even spookier times? Okay, we are ALL tired of politics and speeches and ready for children's awesome embrace of costumes! When just donning a different persona via a cape, a hat, make-up or a mask sends a child into the delightful realm of not only make-believe but a different reality. I could use a different reality now and then. How about you?

This Thought however, is about reality and the need for and art of Forgiving. I hope some of this resonates with you. Let me know what you think.

Questions? Just call me!

Donna and David

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OCTOBER: "The Art of Forgiving"

The importance of forgiving as a generous and spiritual act of cleaning up any Space is increasingly coming up in our work with couples. We are even creating a section on forgiveness to be added to our second level workshop.

We tend to think of forgiveness as something desired or needed in big issues like unfaithfulness. It occurs to me that we also need the art of forgiveness when our partner forgets to pick up our prescription at the pharmacy.

I now believe that the art of forgiving is rooted in our ability to validate; to see the

world through someone else's eyes. I can forgive you with my lips in a sort of "cheap grace" way. But in order to forgive you from my heart, I have to really take the time and effort to understand why you could have done what you did. This involves crossing the bridge into your world and being in dialogue.

Nothing in any relationship is as difficult as forgiving. And nothing gives greater opportunity for real connection.

Here are some wise thoughts on this great topic:

- * Forgiveness is a choice.
- * "Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong." (M. Ghandi)
- * "To err is human; to forgive divine." (A. Pope)
- * Forgiveness is a gift you give yourself.
- * Forgiveness is more what you do for yourself, not for someone else.
- * Forgiveness builds connection/energy while resentment drains connection/energy.
- * Forgiveness is the ultimate act of abundance.
- * Withholding forgiveness is like drinking poison and expecting the offending person to die.
- * Withholding forgiveness is to choose to remain the victim.
- * You may never forget but you can always choose to forgive.

And, finally, a quote from Oscar Wilde:
"Always forgive your enemies...nothing annoys them so much."

As always, your comments are welcomed!

David (and Donna)

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Forgiveness is the fragrance that the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it. Mark Twain

The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong. Mahatma Gandhi

When you forgive, you in no way change the past - but you sure do change the future. Bernard Meltzer

Mistakes are always forgivable, if one has the courage to admit them. Bruce Lee

Anger begets more anger, and forgiveness and love lead to more forgiveness and love. Mahavira

Forgiveness means letting go of the past. Gerald Jampolsky

Forgive me my nonsense, as I also forgive the nonsense of those that think they talk sense. Robert Frost

Forgiveness is a virtue of the brave. Indira Gandhi

We are on this journey with you. Keep in touch!

Sincerely,

**David and Donna Bowman
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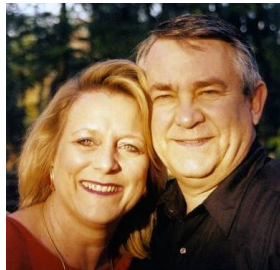
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Issue: #91
November 2016



Dear Friends,

We hope you have a spirit of thankfulness left over from the Thanksgiving holiday. Did you know that other countries began adopting this holiday? Granted, they did not celebrate for the same reason we celebrate in America, but definitely others appreciate the sentiment of gratitude and thankfulness. Some days it feels as though we are becoming more divided and have to struggle to find something to be thankful for, especially when dealing with that cranky partner, co-worker or child in our lives. Perhaps finding a bit of curiosity as to what is going on with this person and compassion in dealing with him or her would help. I have some suggestions.

Donna and David

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**NOVEMBER: Curiosity and
Compassion: (The keys to relational
maturity)**

**There is an old adage that goes like this: "If
you can't say something positive, then don't**

say anything at all." As I think about couples (and, really, all relationships) there are so many levels in which the adage is very wise. At a brain science level, we know that no one is at their best when we are hearing or firing off negative stuff. The cathartic value of spewing negativity is very small compared to the energy required for the cleanup.

So why is it so difficult to keep any dialogue from devolving into negative trade offs? Again, it is brain science that also tells us that our receptors for hearing the negative far outweigh the receptor space for hearing the positive. Financial people say that the fear of losing money far exceeds the joy of making money. It seems so much easier to fuss about what we don't have and don't want than to create an abundant statement of what we would like. When couples are in dialogue, I notice that positive statements such as, "You're beautiful" go un-mirrored while the negative statements are mirrored exactly.

I saw this even before Imago. Back in my preaching days, when I would deliver a sermon with some prophetic (read guilt) content about, you know, how people aren't acting right and how the world is going astray (I never really said "hell",) I would get the most affirming comments. "You really let us have it today, Pastor." "I liked THAT sermon very much." But when I delivered a sermon appealing to the positive and the hope in all of us, it seemed to fall on deaf ears.

No question about it. Fear carries the day in the short term, whether in parenting, or sermons, or politics, or international relations. But does it build trust and relational maturity?

Let me tell you my path to visiting Donna (or anyone else) with curiosity and compassion rather than negative reactivity. (I am

successful some of the time; not all).
Visiting is hardest when you hear something
you don't like or agree with, of course.

Here's what I have decided:

1. I don't have to interrupt and tell her how much I hate what she is saying. She already knows it.
2. I don't have to tell her how wrong she is. If she's wrong she already knows that and if she feels right I am wasting my time and energy correcting her.
3. When I am visiting Donna or another person who is fired up about something, they really are not very interested in what I'm thinking anyway. (Does anyone really want to see pictures of your great trip out West?)
4. Most people, most of the time just want to be heard and understood. They are not really looking for solutions or advice.
5. My thoughts on the matter are worthwhile only if they are consciously invited. (This is rare.)

So what am I left with? AHHH. The beautiful gifts of curiosity and compassion. "Tell me more about that" has produced more intimacy than any other three words I can imagine. And, "You make sense to me," is a serious breath of fresh air that most people have craved since they were infants. I have experienced countless dramatic turn arounds in really tough situations with the artful use of these phrases of curiosity and compassion.

One finally adage of my creation: "When someone (like your partner) is railing at you; don't just do something.....stand there with C & C."

Let me know how it works. We'll help.

Come see us for an intensive of three hours or more. We can change your life!

Sincerely,

D&D

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**Gratitude can transform common days into thanksgivings, turn routine jobs into joy, and change ordinary opportunities into blessings.
William Arthur Ward**

Gratitude is the inward feeling of kindness received. Thankfulness is the natural impulse to express that feeling. Thanksgiving is the following of that impulse. Henry Van Dyke

People who think they know everything are a great annoyance to those of us who do. Isaac Asimov

As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them. John F. Kennedy

The essence of all beautiful art, all great art, is gratitude. Friedrich Nietzsche

At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep

**gratitude of those who have lighted the flame
within us. Albert Schweitzer**

**A day without sunshine is like, you know,
night. Steve Martin**

**We are on this journey with you. Keep in
touch!**

Sincerely,

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Donna Reeves Bowman, LCSW-C & David L. Bowman, MDiv

Thought of the Month News and Notes

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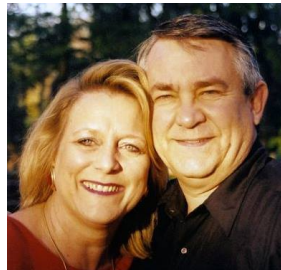
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Issue: #92
December 2016



Dear Friends,

It is such a joy for us to wish you Happy Holidays! By December each year we are busy implementing the plans we hatched earlier in the year and are looking forward to the challenges of the new year. Your stories impact our plans and we hold you in our hearts as we look for inspiration or that perfect phrase or answer to your personal dilemma...whatever will help you on your path.

Yes, we are present in your lives, and hopefully you will let us know how we can help you in your journey. But for now, revel in the joy of family, friends and the love of others for a joyous holiday season.

Donna and David

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DECEMBER: The Present of Presence

I'll make the thought for this month short and sweet so that you can concentrate on making the Hanukkah or Christmas Holidays

alive and joyful.

A lot of the season centers on giving gifts to those who are in our lives. The origin of gift giving for Hanukkah is around the celebration of the recovery of the Temple of Jerusalem in 165 B.C. from Syrian rule. For Christians, gift giving goes back to the respectful reverence paid to the Christ child by the strange foreigners known as Magi. (Historically, these Magi did not arrive until Jesus was a toddler, but that fact kind of messes with your manger scenes, doesn't it? Sorry!)

At any rate, the real gifts have to do with Presence. For the Jews, it is the Presence once again in the temple which is rightfully theirs. For the Christians it is the Presence of people who show up with honor for the unfolding of the story of Christ.

As I think about it, whenever I have had the occasion to ask someone "What do you really want?" the answer almost always involves not a present, but the Presence of another.

"I want to have more years with my wife"

"I wanted my Dad to just be there"

"I want him to just listen to me"

"I want her to spend more time with the family"

"I want him/her just to come home again"

"I want us just to be able to talk about things peacefully"

These are the deepest yearnings that I hear people wanting. For this holiday season, go ahead and get creative. Give someone the present of your Presence. Be proactive. Show up. Make it happen.

Happy Holidays to all our wonderful Imago couples. We think of you as a group of 1700 or so couples out there making the world a better place one couple at a time.

(April 1-2 is our Second Level "Overcoming Reactivity" weekend. Many folks have moved to a new level through this workshop. It is packed with tools for increased positive connection. Please contact us to get registered.)

Warmly,

David and Donna

**MARK YOUR CALENDARS...LOTS OF OPPORTUNITIES
COMING UP!**

Be sure to watch this space or check our web site for future opportunities.

Getting the Love You Want Workshops

January 6-8, 2017, Frederick. MD

February 10-12, Frederick, MD

March 17-19, Frederick, MD

Next Step Workshop

April 1-2, 2017, Frederick, MD

Quotes of the Month

"Christmas is not as much about opening our presents as opening our hearts." Janice Maeditere

"Mail your packages early so the post office can lose them in time for Christmas." Johnny Carson

"Love the giver more than the gift." Brigham Young

"I bought my brother some gift-wrap for Christmas. I took it to the Gift Wrap department and told them to wrap it, but in a different print so he would know when to stop unwrapping." Steven Wright

**"One of the most glorious messes in the world is the mess created in the living room on Christmas day. Don't clean it up too quickly."
Andy Rooney**

"Christmas is a time when you get homesick - even when you're home." - Carol Nelson

"I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year." - Charles Dickens

We are on this journey with you. Keep in touch!

Sincerely,

**David and Donna Bowman
Bowman & Associates, PA**

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